

Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLeon, eds. *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*. Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008. iv + 352pp. \$17.50 paperback.

While it is still usually a surprise to the popular mind, and even to current professional philosophy, to hear that the former pontiff, John Paul II, was not only a defender of orthodoxy but also a philosopher, perceptive Catholic intellectuals of his era and beyond have sought to determine the core, methods, and implications of his philosophical achievements. Penetrating and contemplative, John Paul II's mind unearthed layers of meaning present in Biblical as well as philosophical texts, searching consistently for traces of personhood, whether it be found alienated or accepted.

This volume of essays, based on papers given at the conference "The Philosophical Legacy of John Paul II" (March 23-25, 2006, St. Joseph College, CT) focuses on the various philosophical predilections of John Paul II and attempts both to clarify and unify them, focusing especially on his phenomenological thought. The volume is divided into three parts: part I considers the relationship between Thomism and phenomenology; part II deals with John Paul II's social philosophy, with an emphasis on person and action; part III is titled "On the Metaphysical Question: What Is a Human Being?" Each contributor is sympathetic to John Paul II's overall project, and unwilling, therefore, to dismiss his work as simply (say) Marxist, post-Kantian, or uncritically Thomistic. Where contributors do seem partisan, they want to claim Wojtyła as their own. Moreover, the authors of some essays do well to consider the late pope's dramaturgical works, speeches, and poetry as well as his encyclicals, other pontifical writings, and philosophical works proper.

Highlights of the volume are George McLeon's Prologue and Hans Köchler's essay, "Karl Wojtyła's Notion of Man." The latter essay puts firsthand anecdotal flesh on some of the lesser known aspects of Wojtyła's intellectual development. For instance, as is well known, Wojtyła officially approved of the rendering of *The Acting Person* for the *Analecta Husserliana*—though the translation omitted much of the original scholastic terminology—and Hans Köchler, concerned to approach Wojtyła's thought apart from a theological hermeneutic, points to this approval as a sign of Wojtyła's overall commitment to phenomenology as an independent discipline (171). McLeon emphasizes, however, that there is more to the story, namely, that Wojtyła "requested that these terms be restored" to the second (ultimately unrealized) edition of the work (25). In general, these two

papers are at odds, although both authors were colleagues of Wojtyła. Certainly, though, there is something unphenomenological in any account of Wojtyła's thought that suspends the question of Wojtyła's deep, mystical faith, as Köchler's seems to do. Based as it was on the writings of St. John of the Cross, Wojtyła's faith established the fundamental trajectory of his philosophy, which philosophy ultimately sought to correct an emotivist morality, as Michael Waldstein (for one) has argued.¹

Several other elements of the book were illuminating. Though a personalist might be tempted to think that nature is fundamentally opposed to personhood, since, on a *phenomenological* level—or in idea—nature seems to be the source of “what happens,” and personhood the source of action,² Paul Kucharski emphasizes their organic connection. He notes that Wojtyła recognizes *both* the phenomenological and the Thomistic senses of “nature,” pointing to Wojtyła's essay in *Person and Community* titled “The Human Person and Natural Law.”³

Peter Colosi argues that Wojtyła's notion of the incommunicable uniqueness of every human being derives mainly from Scheler. As Colosi notes, however, most personalists (whether “Thomistic” or not) would locate the center of this uniqueness in personhood, not what Scheler calls an “individual value essence.” Three sources come to mind which, I think, could enrich Colosi's argument: for an account of the “ineffability” of personhood, Maritain's *The Person and the Common Good*⁴; for the idea of “knowledge through love”—*connatural* knowledge—both St. Thomas on the gift of wisdom and, again, Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. Colosi has, I am sure, already perceived the relevance of Wojtyła's notion of the “weight” of personal being, as presented by Joseph Rice, for his own project.

Most helpful and scholarly, in fact, was Rice's contribution, not only because of his fluency in Polish, but because of his sensitivity to John Paul II's mystical and poetic dimensions. Moreover, he shows an apt understanding of Wojtyła's *The Acting Person*; in fact, Rice's next project (in my view) should be that second (restored) edition of Wojtyła's philosophical *magnum opus*! Finally, as Rice makes much of the notion of “intuition” as a means of cognizing absolute divinity (as well as the inner self) I can't resist pointing to the affinity between what Rice calls “a pre-philosophical consciousness of personhood” (300) and Maritain's “spiritual pre-conscious.”⁵

In general, though this volume presents an eclectic collection of perspectives on the thought of John Paul II, more work needs to be done to establish the positive connections of metaphysics and phenomenology

in the late Pope's thought, since, for him, the telos of both approaches is a richer, fuller understanding of personhood. John Paul II recognized (for instance, in the opening pages of his 1969 *Love and Responsibility*) that both the metaphysical and phenomenological notions of "subject" can be applied harmoniously to the human person. Likewise, in "Thomistic Personalism," Wojtyla is not so much critiquing Thomas's concept of person as filling it out, "creatively completing" it (to use Norris Clarke's phrase⁶), taking care all the while to establish the necessary connection between rational being and consciousness in all its forms. Certainly, Wojtyla employed the phenomenological method; rich and descriptive, his thought shows an openness to human experience as a whole. The sense in which Wojtyla avoided Husserl's rigorous epoche needs to be clarified, however, for his phenomenology obviously affirms and respects, rather than suspends, the being of the person, and unequivocally yields to an objective metaphysical and moral order.

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Notes

1. See Waldstein's introduction to his translation of *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books & Media: 2006).
2. John Crosby, for instance, makes a note of the fact that person and nature differ "in idea" but "do not express two different subjects of being" in his *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1996), 39, citing as a reference Wojtyla's account of person and nature in *The Acting Person*.
3. *Person and Community*, ed. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).
4. *The Person and the Common Good* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press: 1985), esp. p. 39.
5. See, e.g., *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955) esp. Chapters Three and Four.
6. *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1998) 1.